La Scène en Version Originale

Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

PUPS

The idea of a dialogue heard "in its original language" is usually applied to film. This book applies it to theatre, and explores the workings of untranslated shows, performed in all the foreignness of their original voices and gestures. The question of translating for the stage is currently giving rise to much academic discussion, but the stage and theatre research programme at Paris-Sorbonne (PRITEPS) has here chosen to focus on the reverse phenomenon, and to examine the performance of plays before audiences whose language is not that of the actors, putting this linguistic otherness forward as part of the aesthetic experience. From the travels of the Italian companies welcomed throughout the courts of Europe to those of the Chinese actors invited to the World's Fairs, there is no dearth of examples, whose specificity, reception and influence call for in-depth study.

This interdisciplinary collection of articles brings together various approaches, cultures and languages, in a comparative perspective. Using a wide array of case studies – exotic or regional, historical or contemporary – the chapters investigate what comes across, beyond language, in the theatre. Do the spectators find themselves turned into discoverers, cultural elitists, or even voyeurs? Is their understanding of the show rooted in the music of the words, or the gesticulation of the bodies? The papers gathered in this volume explore the distinctive features of foreign-language shows and inquire into the institutions where they are performed, the sociology of their audiences and the question of surtitles. From one chapter to the next, they gradually define a theatrical experience that is as fertile as it is disconcerting – anchored in sensory perception, and concentrating the spectator's attention entirely on powerful rhythms, delicate gestures, and echoing voices.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

La scène en version originale

PUPS

Ouvrage publié avec le concours de
l'université Paris-Sorbonne et du PRITEPS

Les PUPS sont un service général de l'université Paris-Sorbonne

isbn : 979-10-231-0254-3

Maquette et mise en page : Emmanuel Marc Dubois (Issigeac)

PUPS
Maison de la Recherche
Université Paris-Sorbonne
28, rue Serpente
75006 Paris

tél. : (33) (0)1 53 10 57 60
fax : (33) (0)1 53 10 57 66

pups@paris-sorbonne.fr
http://pups.paris-sorbonne.fr

AVANT-PROPOS

Julie Vatain-Corfdir

Si l'art théâtral est celui de la parole incarnée, qu'advient-il de cette parole en terre étrangère ? Comme en témoigne, dès le XVII^e^ siècle, la présence de comédiens italiens dans plusieurs capitales européennes, l'itinérance est inscrite dans l'histoire du théâtre mondial, dans la vie des troupes et la carrière des acteurs. Il convient donc de s'interroger sur le spectacle comme objet exporté, dans ses modalités changeantes comme dans sa réception. C'est ce qu'a souhaité faire ici, dans le cadre de ses travaux à la croisée des scènes, le Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le théâtre et les pratiques scéniques de Paris-Sorbonne (PRITEPS). À l'heure où de nombreuses publications se penchent sur les difficultés et les bonheurs de la traduction théâtrale, ce volume choisit de se consacrer à l'expérience inverse : celle du théâtre en version originale, joué pour un public dont la langue n'est pas celle du spectacle, en revendiquant l'altérité linguistique comme part de l'expérience esthétique.

La création contemporaine abonde en mises en scènes multilingues et multiculturelles, affirmant l'« étrangéisation » du théâtre comme clé d'une perception renouvelée, mais l'histoire montre que ces pratiques s'appuient sur une tradition vieille de plusieurs siècles. Des comédiens français invités par Catherine de Russie aux acteurs anglais qu'accueille l'Odéon en 1827, des tournées de Sarah Bernhardt en Amérique du Nord à celles de Louis Jouvet en Amérique du Sud, des applaudissement reçus par les comédiens-danseurs japonais à l'exposition universelle de 1900 aux succès en langue japonaise de Simon McBurney ou de Claude Régy, le théâtre aime à faire entendre la musique d'une autre langue, à explorer la transmission du spectacle au-delà des mots.

Une enquête sur ce phénomène exige de s'intéresser non seulement à la spécificité des spectacles qui voyagent, mais aussi aux institutions qui les accueillent, aux publics auxquels ils se destinent, et aux effets qu'ils produisent. Si les barrières langagières peuvent en effet provoquer la méfiance des spectateurs, incitant les artistes à les rassurer par la distribution de synopsis ou la mise en place de surtitres, elles permettent également de placer l'art théâtral sous une autre lumière. L'altérité linguistique concentre l'attention sur le langage scénique, sur l'expressivité du geste, sur le rythme et la musicalité de la déclamation, éduquant le public à une forme de réception ancrée dans le sensible plus que dans le discours. La question de l'équilibre entre sens et

sonorité suggère d'ailleurs une comparaison avec l'opéra, car la langue étrangère n'est pas perçue de la même manière par les spectateurs lorsqu'elle est parlée ou chantée. Les spectacles venus d'ailleurs enrichissent, enchantent ou déconcertent la réception, de même qu'ils influencent les pratiques de la scène « d'accueil », qui se renouvelle au contact de dictions inaccoutumées et de nouvelles cultures du geste. Faire entendre une pièce en version originale, c'est croiser à la fois les langues et les traditions théâtrales, et raviver l'art dramatique en le dépouillant du verbe pour mettre l'accent sur le corps et la voix.

L'approche de ce volume consiste à mettre en regard des pratiques et des langues diverses, de manière à enrichir le questionnement théorique par la comparaison. Le vaste éventail d'exemples abordés par les articles a suggéré un ordre de présentation à la fois chronologique et thématique, selon les sections. La chronologie s'impose

en effet pour étudier les origines européennes du phénomène, à savoir les pratiques voyageuses des comédiens italiens, ces précurseurs de l'exportation des spectacles et de la bigarrure linguistique. Le premier volet s'y consacre, avec trois articles qui étudient successivement la présence italienne sur les scènes parisiennes aux XVI^e^, XVII^e^ et XVIII^e^ siècles. Il s'agit là d'analyser la saveur du bilinguisme franco-italien et son effet sur le public (Charles Mazouer), la place du geste et de l'agilité corporelle dans un théâtre improvisé fondé sur le jeu physique (Charles Mazouer, Alessia Gennari), et plus généralement de mettre en doute l'idée de barrière linguistique conçue comme un obstacle. La question de l'institutionnalisation de ce théâtre et de sa perception dans les sources contemporaines mérite également d'être étudiée (Sandrine Blondet, Alessia Gennari), ainsi que le statut des comédiens, indépendants ou placés sous le patronage des Grands (Sandrine Blondet).

Après cette mise en perspective des premières pratiques du genre, une deuxième section se tourne vers le surgissement de la langue « autre » comme principe de création théâtrale. C'est ici un regroupement thématique qui permet de mettre en regard des cas d'études variés, de la langue régionale à la langue exotique. Les scènes en occitan de *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* et la pastorale languedocienne de Mondonville invitent ainsi à s'interroger sur le choix de la langue occitane : sa portée, son accessibilité, et sa valeur théâtrale (Bénédicte Louvat-Molozay). Le rapport du spectateur aux sonorités d'une autre langue est également analysé à travers l'*Électre* de Sophocle, retransmise en grec à la télévision britannique avec un succès inattendu qui souligne la suprématie de l'intensité émotive et de la musicalité du jeu (Amanda Wrigley). L'exemple des comédiens chinois sur la scène française permet ensuite d'apprécier la façon dont les spectacles éduquent le regard du public, sortant progressivement des confins d'un exotisme bizarre pour devenir un art apprécié (Shih-Lung Lo). Ces exemples divers

et révélateurs posent avec acuité la question de la déclamation autre, et présentent diverses facettes des dispositifs de compréhension mis en place pour le public.

Un troisième volet se consacre à la fortune de la langue française sur les scènes étrangères. La Russie en offre plusieurs exemples, qu'il s'agisse des proverbes dramatiques écrits en français par Catherine II et sa cour (Valentina Ponzetto) ou de troupes françaises invitées à Saint-Pétersbourg au fil du XIXe siècle (Pascale Melani). Les questions qui se posent alors ont trait non seulement aux textes joués en langue étrangère, mais aussi à tout l'univers culturel qu'ils véhiculent, aux modes françaises – qu'elles soient littéraires ou vestimentaires – et à la sociologie du public. Ce dernier point intéresse également le phénomène méconnu du « Théâtre français d'Amérique », troupe française implantée à New York avant même l'arrivée de Jacques Copeau, avec pour public privilégié une élite culturelle qui fait grand cas de ses affiliations européennes (Mechele Leon).

La dernière section du volume se tourne vers les pratiques linguistiques et les métissages de la scène contemporaine. Depuis la fin du XXe siècle, les créations internationales, le travail sur le sur-titrage et les spectacles présentés en versions multiples sont particulièrement à l'honneur. La reconnaissance dont jouit actuellement le théâtre espagnol alternatif permet de s'interroger sur les modalités de sa réception, sur son influence et sur l'adaptation des spectacles aux lieux où ils sont présentés (Béatrice Bottin). Plus rare, la production d'une même mise en scène en plusieurs langues engage une réflexion sur la valeur et le fonctionnement de ce choix esthétique, et sur ses conséquences en termes de rapport au public et d'efficacité de la mise en scène (Anaïs Bonnier). L'exemple d'un metteur en scène proposant ses spectacles tantôt en traduction, tantôt en langue étrangère, invite enfin à une analyse du jeu de l'artiste avec sa réception, entre distanciation et connivence (Suzanne Fernandez). À travers cette mosaïque de cas d'études sous-tendus par une réflexion théorique, c'est donc un travail approfondi sur le spectacle de l'Autre, dans ses modalités linguistiques et sonores comme dans son exotisme gestuel, que propose ce volume.

BEFORE JACQUES COPEAU: THE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS D'AMÉRIQUE OF NEW YORK, 1913-1917

Mechele Leon

There is growing interest on the part of French and American scholars in the history of French theatre in the United States. Historian of cultural diplomacy Alain Dubosclard has written most recently on this subject in *L'Action artistique de la France aux États-Unis*. Doctoral theses by both French and American students have studied French theatre in New York in particular.[1] In this scholarship, the residency of Jacques Copeau and his company Vieux-Colombier from 1917 to 1919 marks the first significant entry in the history of French-language theatre in New York. Copeau's visit is regarded as an event that greatly influenced the development of the Little Theatre movement in the United States, and inspired a new awareness of scenographic techniques. Through his innovative productions of Molière's plays, he is credited with developing an American understanding of French classical repertory. Histories of Copeau's residency, however, largely ignore the existence of French theatre in New York prior to his visit. In fact, when Copeau arrived in New York in the spring of 1917 to give a series of lectures about the theatre, he was offered the directorship of an existing French-language theatre. This company, the *Théâtre français d'Amérique*, had been created in New York several years before Copeau's arrival. My paper offers a brief history of the *Théâtre français d'Amérique* to explore the context in which Copeau's two-year residency was begun, and the linguistic interests that informed French theatre in New York. This work is part of a larger research project on the history of French-language theatre in New York in the 20th century from the *Théâtre français* in the 1910s to André Barsacq in the 1930s and the post-war visits of Louis Jouvet and the Renaud-Barrault company, among others.

The theatre company that eventually became the *Théâtre français d'Amérique* began its life as the French Drama Society in 1913. As often happens in the history of theatre, the enterprise was born out of a shotgun marriage – *mariage forcé* – between two aspiring theatre producers with similar ideas and inspiration who came to realize that

1 The list of doctoral dissertations and theses on the subject of French theatre in New York is long, and includes most recently Anne Cuisset, *Le Théâtre français à New York (1945-2005): Modalités d'exportation et conditions de réception*, Thèse de doctorat, université Paris-Ouest, 2005.

they would have a greater chance of success if they combined their efforts. On one side was the actress Madame Yorska, the stage name of Charlotte Stern, also known under her married name as Countess Venturini. Yorska was born in New York. Her father was a Russian diplomat and her mother an American from Louisiana, of French ancestry. Yorska was educated in Paris. She attended the *Conservatoire*, became a protégée of Sarah Bernhardt, and eventually starred in Bernhardt's 1911 production of Racine's *Esther*. Yorska traveled to New York City in December 1912 in hopes of launching an American acting career. When she learned that the city lacked a French-language theatre, she was struck by the idea that she could be the creator of one. Her vision for this theatre was not timid. She imagined a permanent, professional theatre in the Broadway theatre district. It would have a sixteen-week season of plays using professional and renowned actors invited from France performing classic and modern French drama in French.

As news of Yorska's initiative spread through New York's Francophile circles, it drew the attention of Lucien Bonheur. Born in Bordeaux in 1864, Bonheur (cousin of the artist Rosa Bonheur) was a long-time New York resident. He emigrated to the US in 1888 and by 1900 had become active in New York politics. Bonheur served as vice president of the New York chapter of the *Alliance française* and was director of its amateur theatre club, the *Cercle dramatique de l'Alliance française* (CDAF). In existence since the formation of the New York *Alliance française* in 1907, the CDAF was, by 1912, offering a regular program of three or four public presentations of French drama a month, in a lecture hall above the New Amsterdam Theatre on 42nd Street.

I have not discovered what prior theatrical experience Lucien Bonheur possessed. Evidence suggests that he did not have the knowledge of theatre, artistic vision, or talent of Yorska. Through his political and *Alliance française* affiliations, however, he was deeply connected to a social network that gave him access to the community of admirers and benefactors of French arts in New York. According to Yorska's account of the founding of the French Drama Society – an account, it must be added, that was written in the aftermath of what became a very hostile relationship between her and Bonheur – he forced Yorska to renounce her plans for a French Theatre and join forces with him. He threatened that, if she did not do so, he would increase the activities of the CDAF to compete and thus crush her efforts.[2] If she would join with him, they would convert the *Cercle Dramatique* into a professional and permanent French-language theatre company. Thus was born the French Drama Society in

2 Madame Yorska, *Le Théâtre Français d'Amérique: Its Beginnings. Its Development*, trans. by G. Stubbs, n.p., 1917, p. 13.

December 1913 with Lucien Bonheur as its producer and business manager and Yorska as its artistic director. In the four years of its existence, the company came quite close to achieving Yorska's vision. It began rather cautiously with performances once or twice a week in a small lecture hall above a theatre near Central Park. In its second year, however, it began giving eight performances a week and touring to Boston and Philadelphia. In its third season, it acquired the Garrick Theatre on 35th Street – the playhouse later given to Copeau in 1917. By the time it ceased production in the spring of 1917, the TFA had produced approximately 100 different plays – most of them drawn from the 19th- and 20th-century repertoire, from Sardou to Brieux, Porto-Riche, and Bernstein – and presented hundreds of performances. It not only produced its work in several playhouses in New York City's theatre district, but also toured to Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Providence. It recruited professional actors from France and employed dozens of French-speaking actors in New York. While it is a forgotten enterprise today, the *Théâtre français d'Amérique* was an ambitious pioneer in the history of French language theatre in America.

Multilingual as New York City already was in 1912, it is not surprising that Yorska envisioned it as the perfect environment for the establishment of French-language theatre. A great influx of immigrants had made New York the US capital for the foreign-language stage. The city possessed established German, Yiddish, Italian, and Chinese theatres, playhouses where tens of thousands of immigrants could gather and collectively formulate their new world identities. In the midst of a demographic explosion, New York City in the first decades of the 20th century was a kinetic field and visual landscape of energy and flux. It was an inherently theatricalized urban space, and even written narratives of its streets and people were predicated on the metaphor of the theatrical and cinematic scene.[3] Just days into her visit to the city, Yorska recorded her experience of this from her room at the Astor Hotel. She views New York City as a dynamic international mosaic – or, rather, a multicultural jigsaw puzzle missing just one essential piece:

> Every night I stayed at my window, watching the incessant coming and going of street cars, autos, the crowds, the luminous advertisements, veritable rivals of the stars,

3 Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 10-12. The theatrical notion of the "scene" was a prevalent metaphor in the depiction of New York life in the early 20th century, and employed to organize the narrative of its communities at a time when immigrant populations were growing by the millions. In addition to a proliferation of theatres where scenes of New York life were portrayed, examples of the visual scene as an urban epistemology are evidenced in photography (Jacob Riis' photo-documentation of immigrant ghettos in *How the Other Half Lives)* and in literature (Henry James' *The American Scene*).

> which passed and re-passed upon the great napkin of the sky. The thought that soon, perhaps, in the midst of all this metropolitan activity, of this exuberant flowering of entertainment to which international elements of every sort contribute, the French dramatic art would have its own temple, and that the beautiful and ardent works of the land of Racine and of Henry Bataille would some day cause the great cosmopolitan soul of New York to vibrate, filled me with a delicious fever.[4]

Many of Yorksa's New York friends, while they "dwelt so upon the regret which they felt at being deprived of French performances," tried to dissuade her from this fanciful project.[5] "The bigger part of the audience is German. They have very little interest in French artists and French plays," says one.[6] Another tells Yorska that she is dreaming if she thinks that the American public cares for the beauty of French dramatic art: "This country is admirable as far as anything related to commerce is concerned [...] but they couldn't care less [...] about poetry."[7] Above all, they remind her, there is simply not enough of a French population in the city to support such an enterprise. Indeed, the native French colony in New York was not large. At the time of the 1910 census, the French-born population numbered around 20,500. This was greater than that of San Francisco (6,670), Chicago (5,550), or New Orleans (3,720) but far smaller than New York's number of German-born (324,000), Italians (250,000), or Eastern European Jews (almost a million).[8] Her friends counsel her, moreover, that, if she truly wants a career in the United States, she would do better to pass as a Russian actress instead of a French one and perform in English.[9]

Those who doubted the viability of a French theatre in New York did not understand that its primary audience was not to be the French colony but the American one. As the company itself stated in 1913, the purpose of the French Drama Society was to "create a larger interest in the French drama and language."[10] The company would rely on non-French native spectators for its survival. In 1914, a journalist described the audience for the *Théâtre français d'Amérique* as made up of three populations: first,

4 Madame Yorska, *Le Théâtre Français d'Amérique*, *op. cit*, p. 5.
5 *Ibid*., p. 2.
6 "*Le gros du public est composé d'Allemands. Il ne s'intéresse que très peu aux artistes et aux œuvres françaises.*" (Madame Yorska, *Une actrice française aux États-Unis*, Paris, Éditions Fast, 1920, p. 36.)
7 "*C'est un pays admirable pour tout ce qui est commerce [...] mais ils s'en fichent [...] de la poésie*." (*Ibid*., p. 37.)
8 Henry Blumenthal, *American and French Culture, 1800-1900: Interchanges in Art, Science, Literature, and Society,* Baton Rouge, Louisiana State UP, 1975, p. 8; Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
9 Madame Yorska, *Une actrice française aux États-Unis*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
10 *The New York Times*, 7 December 1913.

the French colony; next, those "who have learned to love the beautiful language of France," and, finally, the "university and high school students who make a specialty of modern languages."[11] A 1915 article in *The New York Times* clarifies, however, that the French colony became the least important of the three. In an interview for the article, Bonheur says, "This theatre is first of all an educational institution. Because the French population of the city is too small to ever support adequately even the smallest theatre, the appeal must be made first to youth seeking increased knowledge of French language and diction and generally speaking to Americans who desire to 'keep up their French'."[12]

Bonheur recognized that French-language theatre in New York could serve a particular community, one that was new and expanding. By 1913, when Yorska and Bonheur's French Drama Society was formed, the number of youths learning French and adults "keeping up their French" was growing rapidly, due in no small part to French government efforts to promote the French language and culture in the United States and "advertise the greatness of France at home and abroad."[13] To correct years of neglect of Franco-American cultural relations, French diplomatic efforts (especially under ambassador to Washington Jules Jusserand) sought to defeat Germany's overwhelming influence in the United States—an influence that the Germans had been advancing intensively, as was evidenced in part by the popularity of German as the most-studied foreign language in the United States by the early 20th century. It was in this context that the *Alliance française* was established in America in 1895 (the New York chapter was founded in 1907), part of a burgeoning movement for the promotion of French culture and language in the US. This movement also included the creation of the France-America Society (*Comité France-Amérique*, 1909), the French Institute (1911), and the National Society for Teachers of French in America (1904).[14] The presence of French courses and study-abroad programs grew at universities. French studies also gained popularity in public and private secondary school education, especially among private institutions in the Northeast and New England, where between 63% and 73% of the approximately 100,000 students taking high school French courses in the US resided.[15] By 1925, as a result of French

11 *The New York Sun*, 2 February 1914.
12 *The New York Times*, 20 April 1915.
13 Robert J. Young, *Marketing Marianne: French Propaganda in America, 1900-1940*, New Brunswick [NJ], Rutgers UP, 2004, p. 26.
14 *Ibid*., p. 11; James S. Pula, *The French in America, 1488-1974: A Chronology & Fact Book*, Dobbs Ferry [NY], Oceana Publications, 1975.
15 Charles H. Handschin, *The Teaching of Modern Languages in the United States*, Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1913, p. 27.

government efforts, in combination with the effects of World War I and significant changes to the stature of modern language study in US higher education, French had not only overtaken but surpassed German as the most-studied modern foreign language in the United States.[16] "The French language is getting a firm grip in polyglot New York City," declared an article in *The New York Times* in early 1914:

> For the past five years interest in the French language has spread until it has grown beyond the dimensions of a cult. It may be a long time before our cabmen [taxi drivers] and our trolley car conductors can speak several languages. It may be some time before the readers of bestsellers will demand Bergson's or Rostand's latest in the original […] but we are on the way to this stage of culture, according to the enthusiastic leaders of the French movement in this city, and the success of the new French Drama Society is evidenced as proof.[17]

As the *Times* article suggests, the audience for the *Théâtre français d'Amérique* was not likely composed of cabmen or trolley car conductors. Rather, it was an educated and affluent audience. In the words of the New York newspapers, they were "persons prominent in society," or simply "society." The *New York Herald Tribune* described the French theatre's audience as follows: "There were many students present and they seemed to find the delivery of the lines in perfect French interesting and helpful. Society was also well represented. Many who were there spend much time abroad and speak French well, and they took satisfaction in hearing every word spoken from the stage."[18] In 1916, a *New York Times* article comments on the progress of the French theatre company, noting that "performances have been entirely satisfactory to the audiences, comprising a comparatively small part of New York's playgoers, to be sure, but made up of persons of keen artistic intelligence and good taste."[19]

---

16 Robert J. Young, *Marketing Marianne*, *op. cit.*, p. 31; Charles H. Handschin, *The Teaching of Modern Languages in the United States*, *op. cit.*

17 *The New York Times*, 1 February 1914. Theatre, it should be mentioned, was not the only place for evidence of new interest in French. The same article discusses an increased demand for French language books: "In two of the larger stores the sale of French books has doubled in the past year. According to the booksellers seven-eighths of the buyers in the case of French books are Americans, and practically all of them women. The greatest demand is for plays, with the interest in novels and biography about equally balanced. There has also been a considerable increase in the number of French books called for at the libraries. In 1909 the circulation department of the Public Library registered a total of 40,000 calls for French books, which has mounted to 61,000 for the past year. According to the librarians at the branches, even where there are French colonies in the neighborhood, the growing demand for French books is made by American students of the language and the literature."

18 *New York Herald*, 22 December 1913.

19 *The New York Times,* 28 February 1916.

It is "good taste" that distinguishes the audience of the *Théâtre français d'Amérique*. It was a receptive community of privileged members who possessed a "cultural predisposition towards things French —a predisposition fed by college-level courses in French literature and languages, by impulses from France in art and architecture, cuisine, fashion, and music, and by frequent, sometimes extended, travel abroad."[20] Historian Robert J. Young summarizes the features of the Francophile class of the first decades of the 20th century as follows:

> [I]n America, there was a small intellectual elite whose family money, typically, assured them of an exceptional education, and whose education acquainted them with an international world and with international languages. This of course, was no guarantee that recipients of such a benefice would end up with a bottomless reservoir of affection for the foreign cultures they had savored, even if one suspects that the possibilities for genuine affinity would be greater among the informed than the ignorant. That certainly seems to have been the case for Americans schooled in the history of France and in the marvels of its cultural present. The cuisine and the fashion, the architecture and the interior design, the art and the literature—all beckoned to those with money, time, inclination, and taste.[21]

To cater to the interests of this audience community, the French Theatre of America offered "literary matinees." These afternoon performances, accompanied by lectures and even French diction lessons, were designed for secondary school students in New York and touring cities. As Bourdieu reminds us, acquiring a level of language competency that distinguishes those who are initiated into its proper use from those who are not is a function of economic means. "The cost of education," he writes, "is neither a simple notion nor a socially neutral one."[22] Attending performances at the TFA, American spectators were exercising a linguistic competency made possible by education. The TFA served the children of parents who themselves were likely to be educated, who had traveled abroad, and who prided themselves on their knowledge of European high culture. The matinee students, like their adult counterparts, patronized a theatre that allowed them to exercise their comprehension of the French language —a comprehension that rarified education, economic means, travel opportunities, and social networks had permitted them to acquire.

20 Robert J. Young, *Marketing Marianne*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
22 "*Le coût de formation n'est pas une notion simple et socialement neutre.*" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982, p. 43.)

Language in theatre is an "instrument of cultural and linguistic solidification" for communities of spectators.[23] An immigrant community, for example, attends theatre in its native language in part as a way to restore and reassert linguistic identity. However, just as performances of Shakespeare's plays do more cultural work than merely solidifying a community of English speakers, affirming the expertise of those with the acquired ability to comprehend 17th-century verse drama, language in the theatre also inscribes and reasserts class distinctions. The acquisition and proper use of language as a means of social distinction is what Bourdieu referred to as a "linguistic market." He writes that "the establishment of a linguistic market allows for a form of objective competition, whereby legitimate language skills can function as linguistic capital, generating, through each social exchange, a profit in terms of distinction"[24] Attending the plays of the *Théâtre français d'Amérique*, with its French drama *en version originale*, provided its audiences with the opportunity to exercise, display, and reinforce a linguistic competency shared by a privileged class with economic and cultural capital. This is where the socio-linguistic function of New York's French theatre is most clearly revealed. Consider the fact that French plays in English translation were hugely popular on the New York stage at the time; proven successes from Paris were the bread and butter for a number of famous Broadway producers, including the Frohmans, Shuberts, and David Belasco.[25] That French drama in English was so popular, therefore, raises a question: why French? Following Bourdieu, I suggest that the added value of French theatre *en version originale* was that it permitted an elite subsection of New Yorkers to perform through this theatrical social exchange a linguistic competence; it permitted them to employ linguistic capital that the ordinary masses of Broadway theatregoers did not possess.

Let us recall that Madame Yorska was inspired by a fervent desire to promote French language and culture and to build in New York her "temple to French dramatic art." This is an interesting obsession for a woman born in New York City to Russian and American parents. Instead, from several possible self-identifications, Madame Yorska, a.k.a. Countess Venturini, a.k.a. Charlotte Stern, chose French. In this respect, she was not only the founder of the TFA but its ideal spectator. That is to say, like her

23 Marvin A. Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 3.

24 "*La constitution d'un marché linguistique crée les conditions d'une concurrence objective dans et par laquelle la compétence légitime peut fonctionner comme capital linguistique produisant, à l'occasion de chaque échange social, un profit de distinction.*" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.)

25 The popularity of contemporary French plays in translation for New York commercial theatre is catalogued in Hamilton Mason's study *French Theatre in New York: A List of Plays, 1899-1939*.

audiences, Madame Yorska was a passionate American Francophile for whom French represented the practice, affiliation, and affirmation of universal cultural values. This claim to universality, where French is not merely a language but represents access to Enlightenment thought, was an artifact of the 18th century and remained the foundation of the ascendancy of French studies at the beginning of the 20th century in America.[26] Gustave Lanson, reflecting on his time as a visiting professor at Columbia University in 1910, noted the growing prestige of French studies. For eager students, he writes, French is "the language of culture *par excellence*, a study that culminates in the achievement and substantiation of modern civilization."[27]

The establishment of what was expected to be the first permanent French-language theatre in New York City occurred in a context of a unique linguistic multiplicity and cultural heterogeneity. The spectators of the TFA enjoyed a foreign-language drama that was precisely not performed in any of those languages spoken by the masses of recent immigrants who nightly filled the "ethnic" theatres of turn-of-the-century New York—in particular the Yiddish, Italian, German, or Chinese-language stages. Nor was the TFA designed for those with newly acquired English skills, who could attend translations of French *boulevard* farces in the Broadway playhouses. It is telling that French-language theatre is not typically included in studies of ethnic theatre in America.[28] "Until recently," writes Antoine Compagnon, "French had never been regarded as a foreign language, neither in the United States, nor in several other countries. For a long time, French was the language of culture and the second language of the erudite outside of France. At American universities, French commanded the same respect as English and philosophy and was not normally equated with other European languages like Spanish, Italian, or German."[29] Perhaps the French stage does not suit our notion of "ethnic" because our histories are written by those educated by the same institutions and with the same European cultural biases that reproduce linguistic legitimacy, define linguistic competence, and still regard French as a foundation of cultural distinction.

26 Marc Fumaroli, *When the World Spoke French* [*Quand l'Europe parlait français*, 2003], trans. Richard Howard, New York, New York Review Books, 2011, *passim*.

27 Gustave Lanson, *Trois mois d'enseignement aux États-Unis. Notes et impressions d'un professeur français*, Paris, Hachette, 1912, quoted in Antoine Compagnon, « Why French Has Become Like Any Other Foreign Language in the United States », in Ieme van der Poel, *et al.* (eds.), *Traveling Theory: France and the United States*, Madison [NJ], Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999, p. 30.

28 French theatre is not included, for example, in Haenni's or Romelyn's study. Maxine Seller's anthology includes a chapter on 18th-19th century French theatre in Louisiana.

29 Antoine Compagnon, « Why French Has Become Like Any Other Foreign Language in the United States », art. cit., p. 29.

From an artistic point of view, the *Théâtre français d'Amérique* did not produce groundbreaking theatrical work, certainly not in the way that Copeau would in its footsteps. The quality of its productions was often weak; they produced no innovations in scenography, as Copeau did with his *tréteau nu*. However, the TFA defined a new cultural space in which the celebrated two seasons of the Vieux-Colombier took place in 1917-1919. It mobilized an army of financial investors, sponsors, patrons, and well-meaning cheerleaders of French arts in New York. It solidified transnational networks of social peers interested in French-American exchange. It accustomed New York's theatre critics to the existence of a French-language theatre among the professional theatres of New York and trained them in appreciating the French stage. Finally, it cultivated a New York audience community that was eager to distinguish itself through linguistic competence in the French stage *en version originale*.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Archer, Stephen Murphy, *Visiting French Repertory Companies in New York: 1900 to March, 1964*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1964.

Blumenthal, Henry, *American and French Culture, 1800-1900: Interchanges in Art, Science, Literature, and Society,* Baton Rouge, Louisiana State UP, 1975.

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982.

Breffort-Blessing, Juliette, « Le Vieux Colombier en Amérique », *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* 33:1 (janvier-mars 1983), pp. 59-70.

Carlson, Marvin A., *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Compagnon, Antoine, « Why French Has Become Like Any Other Foreign Language in the United States », in Ieme van der Poel, *et al.* (ed.), *Traveling Theory: France and the United States*, Madison [NJ], Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999.

Crowder, Douglas, *The French Theatre in New York City, 1917-1939*, Doctoral Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1967.

Donahue, Thomas John, *Jacques Copeau's Friends and Disciples: The Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in New York City, 1917-1919*, New York, P. Lang, 2008.

Dubosclard, Alain, *L'Action artistique de la France aux États-Unis, 1915-1969*, Paris, CNRS, 2003.

Fumaroli, Marc, *When the World Spoke French* [*Quand l'Europe parlait français*, 2003], trans. Richard Howard, New York, New York Review Books, 2011.

Haenni, Sabine, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Handschin, Charles H., *The Teaching of Modern Languages in the United States*, Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1913.

Lindenfeld, Jacqueline, *The French in the United States: An Ethnographic Study*, Westport [CT], Bergin & Garvey, 2000.

Mason, Hamilton, *French Theatre in New York: A List of Plays, 1899-1939*, New York, Columbia UP, 1940.

Pula, James S., *The French in America, 1488-1974: A Chronology & Fact Book*, Ethnic Chronology Series, 20, Dobbs Ferry [NY], Oceana Publications, 1975.

Romeyn, Esther, *Street Scenes: Staging the Self in Immigrant New York, 1880-1924*, Minneapolis, University Of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Seller, Maxine Schwartz (ed.), *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, Westport [CT], Greenwood Press, 1983.

Yorska (Countesse Venturini), Madame, *Une actrice française aux États-Unis*, Paris, Éditions Fast, 1920.

—, *Le Théâtre Français d'Amérique: Its Beginnings. Its Development*, trans. G. Stubbs, n.p., 1917.

Young, Robert J., *Marketing Marianne: French Propaganda in America, 1900-1940*, New Brunswick [NJ], Rutgers UP, 2004.

MECHELE LEON

Mechele Leon is chair of the Department of Theatre at the University of Kansas (USA). She specializes in French theatre history with a focus on cultural politics and national identity. She is author of *Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife* (University of Iowa Press, 2009). Her articles and reviews have been published in *Theatre Journal*, *French Historical Studies*, and *European Studies*. She is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities faculty fellowship and a Bourse Chateaubriand. Living in France from 1996-2001, she taught at the American University of Paris and the University of Paris. Professor Leon has her Ph.D. from Cornell University and a DEA from the University of Paris-Ouest.

Abstract: Histories of French language theatre in America tend to treat the US residency of Jacques Copeau and the Vieux-Colombier (1917 to 1919) as the origin of French language theatre in New York. In fact, a company called the Théâtre français d'Amérique had been producing in French in New York since 1913. Responding to the theme of *version originale,* this paper examines the sociolinguistic function of this

dedicated French language theatre company to suggest that the company allowed a community of New York social elites to extract a profit of distinction (Bourdieu) through sharing their competency in French and, by association, their high-culture European affiliations.
Keywords: French theatre; New York; 1913-1917; Mme Yorska (Comtesse Venturini); Lucien Bonheur; Jacques Copeau; socio-linguistics

Résumé : L'histoire du théâtre en langue française aux États-Unis présente souvent la résidence de Jacques Copeau et de son Vieux-Colombier (1917-1919) comme l'origine du théâtre francophone à New York. En réalité, une troupe nommée le « Théâtre français d'Amérique » jouait en français à New York depuis 1913. Dans le cadre d'une étude sur la « version originale », cet article examine la fonction sociolinguistique de cette troupe, suggérant qu'elle permettait à une élite new-yorkaise d'atteindre à un certain degré de distinction (Bourdieu), en mettant à profit ses connaissances en langue française, et ses affiliations culturelles européennes.

Mots-clés : théâtre français ; New York ; 1913-1917 ; Mme Yorska (Comtesse Venturini) ; Lucien Bonheur ; Jacques Copeau ; sociolinguistique

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

E-THEATRUM MUNDI

The e-Theatrum Mundi series aims to survey theatre from every angle, and on every stage. In the spirit of the printed series from which it takes its inspiration, it is meant as a space for the analysis of theatrical events and performances the world over, collecting works on dramatic form and on dramatic writing, on acting, directing and all forms of stage practices, as well as on reception. The series' specificity lies in the interdisciplinary quality which characterizes each volume, developed in connection with the activities of the stage and theatre research programme at Paris-Sorbonne university (PRITEPS). By bringing together a range of approaches, e-Theatrum Mundi is meant to provide fruitful confrontations between various stages, languages and methodologies, in the field of theatre studies.